

## Medicare.gov questions and answers

5/10/00 4:20 PM

**Q. Medicare.gov has won numerous awards and has been touted by reporters and experts alike as a wonderful resource. Why did you feel you needed to fix something that's not broken?**

A. Medicare.gov has been nationally recognized as an excellent resource of information about Medicare, Medicare benefits, nursing homes, health plan options and other Medicare-related information and we're committed to continually providing the most up-to-date information, resources and tools to meet the needs of the people who are looking for this information. These latest improvements provide more information for visitors, and enable a more diverse audience to access, download and/or print information that they need in the quickest and easiest way possible. It's about expanding easy access and providing the best information possible.

As new information becomes available, technologies develop, and we continue to gather consumer feedback, we will continue to provide the most reliable, easy-to-understand information possible. We view the improvements as "better customer service" to all who need information about Medicare.

**Q: Have you done any market research to support the new improvements?**

A: Yes. The improvements were based on extensive consumer testing, as well as feedback received from the Web site's on-line survey and guestbook.

**Q: What are some of the new features of the Web site?**

A. Medicare information is now easier to read because of an **increased font size** and the use of more visually appealing colors. It has a new **printer-friendly format** that allows consumers to print all pages within each section without links and extraneous text, and an **improved screen reader** version that enables people with visual disabilities to access information. We have also improved access to information by providing links to every area of the site on each page. Also included is **new information on disenrollment rates** for managed care plans and staffing information on nursing homes. I encourage you to go to [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) and see for yourself.

**Q: How much money is HCFA spending on the redesign of the Web site?**

A: The Web site and its redesign are part of our effort to better reach people with Medicare. This is an effort that was initiated by Congress, through the 1997 Balanced Budget Act, to improve Medicare communications to the public. People with Medicare are using the web in record numbers, making the Web site a critical component in achieving that mandate.

**Q: Are user fees involved?**

**A:** Yes, this effort is part of the effort mandated by Congress in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act to improve communications about Medicare.

**Q: But older people don't really use the web. Isn't this a waste of resources?**

**A:** Not at all – [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) receives nearly 1.3 million page views per month. Results from our online survey indicate that the top users of the site are people with Medicare their friends and relatives, who comprise 52% of the visitor population. In addition, 33% of the people who use the site are health care professionals.

The latest Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey showed that Internet access among people with Medicare – those 65 and older – has skyrocketed from 6.8 percent in 1997 to 21.3 percent in 1999.

Other research has found that in 1999, almost 10 million seniors, or 17% of all Americans aged 55 and above, were active internet users, demonstrating that many senior citizens are using the web to get information.

An additional one-third of the visitors are health care professionals who use the Web site to get the latest information on Medicare and provide that information to their patients

**Q: Why would someone use the site instead of calling the hotline or looking up information in the handbook?**

**A:** [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) provides just one of several ways to access information, and provides a way for us to reach the record numbers of people with Medicare who are using the Internet to obtain information. If a person needs to find specific information, he or she can use the Web site to find information tailored to meet his or her needs. The Web site is used to provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive information to people with Medicare and those who help them make health care decisions.

**Q: Is the information on this Web site different than information provided in the Medicare handbook?**

**A:** No. The Web site provides the same up-to-date information in an Internet setting and is a complement to both the *Medicare & You* handbook and other publications, and 1-800-MEDICARE, our official 1-800 number (1-800-633-4227). In fact, the phone operators at the toll-free help line access the Web site as one resource to provide callers with the latest information.

**Q. Are improvements being made to other Medicare communications channels?**

**A:** We are always striving to improve our communications vehicles to assist people with Medicare. There are currently four primary ways that HCFA is reaching out to people with Medicare, including the Web site, *Medicare & You* handbook, 1-800-MEDICARE help line and local outreach initiatives. These four information channels make up the National Medicare Education Program (NMEP). We are always working to improve access to the information and are committed to meeting the needs of people with Medicare with the most up-to-date and accurate information.

**Q:** **Can people with disabilities access the site? (Similar question: Does the Web site take into consideration people with Medicare who have special needs but wish to access the site?)**

**A:** Yes. People with disabilities can access the site using an improved Screen Reader feature that allows people who are blind or visually impaired to get information from our comparison databases. We continue to improve our interactive features for the disabled, and will be adding more improvements to the Screen Reader in July. We will continue to look for advances in technology that will help people with Medicare get the most out of [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

**Q:** **Who is the target audience for [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)?**

**A:** Our main target audiences are people with Medicare, as well as family, friends and others who care for people with Medicare and help them to make health care decisions. Because we are the official Medicare Web site, we hope all Americans will use [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) to learn more about Medicare.

**Q:** **How is [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) reaching various groups within the population of people with Medicare?**

**A:** HCFA feels that it is important for all people with Medicare to have the fastest and most up-to-date information. The Web site provides information in languages other than English, including Spanish and Chinese. It also includes a screen reader version and larger font sizes so that people with visual or other disabilities can access the site more easily.

**Q:** **By using a Web site to provide information, are you discriminating against non-web users?**

**A:** No. [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) is one of a broad range of options for people with Medicare to find important information. Since our audience is using the web in record numbers, the Web site provides an important way for people with Medicare to obtain a wide range of information in the fastest way possible. Seniors who do not want or cannot use our Web site can find the information they need in the other information channels (*Medicare & You* handbook, 1-800-MEDICARE and local outreach initiatives). We also have

partnerships with organizations such as 4H, libraries and advocacy groups that we are using to reach out to people.

**Q: With all the privacy concerns related to gathering and sharing of health-related information on the web, what is [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)'s Privacy Policy?**

**A:** Use of [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) does not require a visitor to provide any personal information. In addition, users can access the Web site's privacy policy at the bottom of every page.